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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, November 11, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THE VINE CROPS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

If you like to solve riddles, I have a nice home-made one for you to try right now. Here it is: "When are vegetables not vegetables?" Wait a minute. I'll put it another way -- "What vegetables are also fruits?"

Ask that question of the food or plant people in the Department of Agriculture and they'll answer: "The vine-vegetables." They'll explain that our vine crops, which we use and think of as vegetables, are fruits to the botanists. On this list go tomatoes, winter squash, eggplant, peppers and cucumbers.

Many people have worried about whether the tomato was a fruit or a vegetable. In fact, the arguments on both sides grew so hot some years ago that the question even reached the Supreme Court. As we said, the tomato is a fruit botanically. But the Supreme Court decided that since the tomato grows in kitchen gardens, sells in the market as a vegetable, and generally appears on the table like other vegetables with the body of the meal, it is a vegetable as far as commerce and general use are concerned. The same rule, I suppose, applies to the other vine crops.

At this time of year, these vine crops are much in evidence. You see gorgeous piles of green or yellow or red-striped squash in the markets these days. If you cut them in sections and bake them with the skin on, seasoning with butter, salt and pepper, you have one of the favorite fall and winter vegetable dishes. Or you may prefer to pare the squash, cut it in small pieces, cook it in water and mash it, again seasoning with salt, pepper, and butter. Many people like mashed squash put in a baking dish and browned over the top in the oven. Others like it made into a pie as you make pumpkin pie.

Speaking of pumpkin, do you know that the pumpkin is a squash to the botanists? Well, the plant people tell me that the pumpkin belongs to the same species as our summer squash in spite of the fact that it ripens along with our winter squash. The Indians were cultivating pumpkins long before Columbus came to America -- cultivating them in fields of corn just as you often see them today. Pumpkin is so popular as pie filling that many people never use it in any other way. But you can use pumpkin boiled and mashed and seasoned, as you do other squash. You can even use it to make a homemade confection -- candied pumpkin chips. Good pumpkin pie filling is really nothing but pumpkin custard which you can bake in custard cups with no crust at all. You can serve it with whipped cream and a dab of plum jam. It makes a particularly good dessert for children. Like other yellow squashes, the pumpkin is a good source of vitamin A and it furnishes a little vitamin C if you don't overcook it.

The Indians in our Western States were cultivating another kind of squash long before the white man arrived. And this squash is coming back into favor nowadays. It is the acorn squash, but growers nowadays refer to it as the Table Queen or Des Moines squash. It is a green winter variety, ribbed, sometimes striped, and small enough to bake in halves for individual servings.

A delicious little relative of the squash and the cucumber is the chayote (pronounced: cha-yo-tay, with the accent on the yo). The chayote isn't common on the market yet, but is well worth using when you can get it. You'll sometimes see it selling under the name of mango-squash, or vegetable pear, or mirliton. It is a native of Mexico and Central America now cultivated in this country and shipped to market in winter from California and the Gulf States, especially Florida and Louisiana. The chayote is pale green, pear-shaped or roundish, 3 to 6 inches in diameter, and almost solid. It has just one big seed in the center. The pale green flesh cooks quickly in very little water, is very tender and has a delicate flavor. Pare the chayote, cut it in half-inch slices, and serve with melted butter. Or, cream it. Or, cut it up and cook it like summer squash.

Now about eggplant -- another one of the vine-vegetables. At this time of year most of the eggplant on the market comes from Florida and Texas. Its shining purple skin adds a rich color contrast to the other autumn vegetables. Curiously enough, the eggplant belongs to the family and even the same genus as the Irish potato, but the part we eat is the fruit of the vine and not the root. In tropical parts of the Old World, where the eggplant first became a popular food, it grows in different colors -- white, purple, black, green, yellow, and variegated.

In the Near East, eggplant is a favorite vegetable stuffed with what cooks over there call "dolma." Dolma is chopped meat, rice, browned onions and chopped parsley. There's an idea American cooks might borrow from near-East cooks. We occasionally serve eggplant baked with stuffing, but more often we slice and fry it; or cut it up and stew it with tomatoes; or scallop it with tomatoes seasoned with onions and green peppers. Eggplant is a good vegetable for variety, though its food value is not great.

Naturally, garden cucumbers are no longer to be had in many parts of the country, but we can still buy cucumbers in the market, shipped from warmer places. And though many people only eat them raw in relish or salad, they're also good cooked. You can fry cucumbers. And they're good diced and cooked slightly, and served with butter or white sauce. Or you can stuff and bake them. Use bread crumbs seasoned with onion and tomato for stuffing. Serve with tomato sauce.

Now for the last vine-vegetable on the list today. This is the sweet pepper which you can buy either green or red. And you can use it both raw and cooked. It has a very high vitamin value -- is especially high in the vitamins A and C. You can stuff the halves of peppers with meat, or rice and cheese, or other mixtures, and bake them. Or you can parboil the pepper, cut it up and cream it.

Some people like pepper cut in strips, rolled in flour and browned in fat. I don't need to add that peppers are old favorites for both relishes and pickles and also for garnishes. Sweet peppers are shipped to market from Florida in quantities allthrough the winter.

